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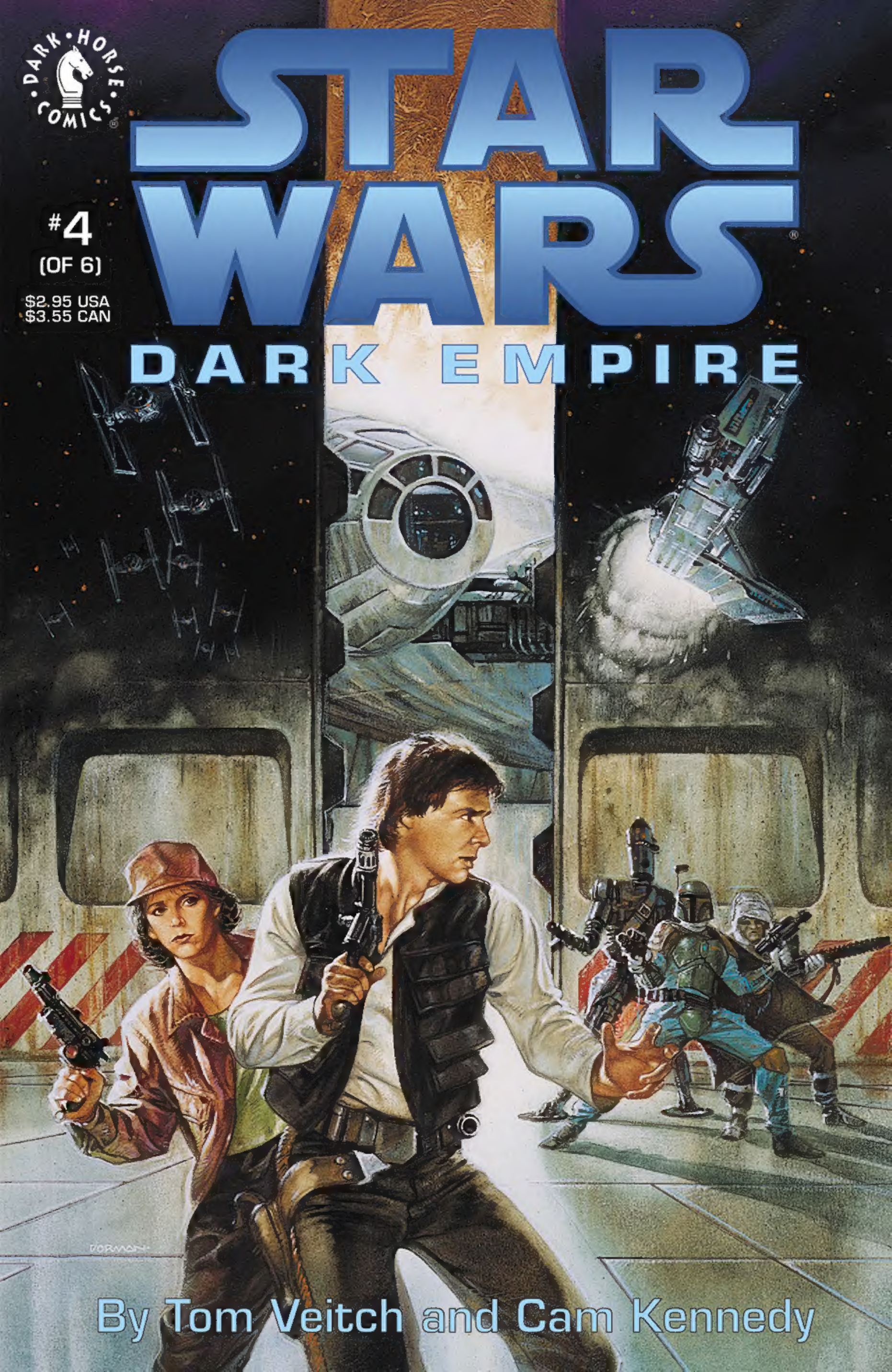

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BOOK 4: CONFRONTATION ON THE SMUGGLERS' MOON

Believing he can resolve the Galactic conflict by learning the Emperor's darkest secrets, Luke Skywalker has at last taken his father's place as the Emperor's protégé and Supreme Commander of the Imperial forces.

The Emperor, for his part, hopes to push his "young apprentice" over the edge, deep into the seductive embrace of the Dark Side of the Force.

Luke's decision to follow his father's destiny is a dangerous and perhaps foolhardy one, for the Emperor has now launched a massive assault upon the crumbling New Republic.

As the Emperor's inexorable *World Devastators* smash the floating cities of Admiral Ackbar's home planet, Lando Calrissian and Wedge Antilles lead Rebel forces in a fierce — and fruitless — attempt to save the gentle Mon Calamari.

Meanwhile, *Han Solo* and *Leia Organa* embark on a quest to free Luke. Together with *Chewbacca* and *C-3PO* they journey to Nar Shaddaa, a smugglers' moon orbiting the Hutt homeworld. There they find Han's old friend, *Shug Ninx*, and old girlfriend, *Salla Zend*, who owns a ship that can travel the Deep Galactic Core with impunity.

And there Leia meets *Vima-Da-Boda*, an old woman Jedi overlooked in the great purge, who gives Leia a mysterious gift.

But the highest clan of Hutts, brothers of the dead gangster Jabba, have placed a fabulous price on the heads of Han and Leia... a price that attracts the attention of an old enemy: *Boba Fett*!

GREETINGS, SOLO.

BOBA FETT!

BUT YOU'RE DEAD!

THE SARLACC FOUND ME SOMEWHAT *INDIGESTIBLE*, SOLO.

YOUR *FRIEND* MAKO HAS BEEN REAL HELPFUL. HE TOLD US RIGHT WHERE TO *FIND* YOU.

--}FZT{--
--}KIK{--

WHAT'S GOIN' ON, MAKO? YOU ADDING ***BETRAYAL*** TO YOUR LIST OF CRIMES?

SORRY, HAN... THE ASKIN' PRICE WAS JUST TOO GOOD... I GOTTA BE THINKIN' OF MY OLD AGE.

A LOT OF PEOPLE WOULD PAY TO SEE YOU ***DEAD***, SOLO. BUT THE HUTTS ARE PAYING ***MORE*** FOR YOU ALIVE.

THEY WANT TO ***WATCH*** YOU DIE.

THEY ***ESPECIALLY*** WANT YOUR LADY FRIEND, FOR WHAT SHE DID TO POOR ***JABBA!***

C'MON, LEIA... THIS HOMECOMING PARTY'S OVER BEFORE IT *STARTS!*

RIGHT!

AS THE RUTHLESS BOUNTY HUNTERS RETURN HAN'S BLASTS, THE HOUSE-KEEPING DROID *ZEE-ZEE* IS CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE --

--}KIK--KIK{--

--}SPREEP{--

HOW ROMANTIC-- WE'RE *BOTH* WANTED BY THE HUTTS.

YEAH, HUSBAND AND WIFE--MARKED FOR *DEATH.*

GUESS I'LL HAVE TO FORGET THOSE FANCY POWER COUPLINGS! ... NINX'LL HAVE TO USE THE CHEAP *MODOG REBUILTS* HE DEALS.

LET'S GO!

BOBA FETT AND DENGAR CHASE THEIR PREY ACROSS THE CROWDED SPACEPORT, INDIFFERENT TO EVERYTHING THAT GETS IN THEIR WAY--

DOWN HERE, PRINCESS--I KNOW THIS CITY LIKE THE BACK OF MY HAND!

I'LL BET YOUR FRIEND MAKO KNOWS IT EVEN BETTER!

CUTTING THROUGH AN ALLEY, HAN AND LEIA EMERGE ON A LANDING TERRACE THAT OVERLOOKS THE CAVERNOUS FLIGHT SHAFTS OF THE CORELLIAN SECTOR--

NICE GOING, HAN--WE'RE TRAPPED!

IT'S NOT MY FAULT! THERE USED TO BE A BRIDGE HERE--HONEST!

GREAT! EVERY BOUNTY HUNTER IN TOWN IS JOINING THE FUN!

SO WHAT DO WE DO NOW--SET UP CAMP AND WAIT FOR THE *RESCUE TEAM?*

UNEXPECTEDLY, ONE OF FETT'S WRIST ROCKETS HITS A *FLOATER* THAT'S CARRYING A FAT HUTT CRIME BOSS--

NE CHAA WONGA!

KA CHUTTA!

UTTERING AN UGLY CRY OF FEAR, THE HUTT CATAPULTS INTO THE ABYSS...

NICE *SHOT*, BOBA. THE ALLIANCE WILL SEND YOU A *MEDAL*.

MAYBE IF WE GIVE IT TO HIM *NOW*, HE'LL STOP TRYING TO *KILL* US!

I NEVER THOUGHT A HUTT'S *SLIME TRACKS* WOULD SMELL SO SWEET!

AS LASER BLASTS ECHO OFF THE CITY CANYON WALLS, HAN WORKS DESPERATELY TO CONTROL THE WILDLY CAREENING FLOATER--

HANG ON, YOUR WORSHIP--I'M TRYING TO FIGURE OUT THESE STRANGE KNOBS AND SWITCHES!

WHY IS IT YOU ALWAYS GET *FORMAL* WHEN YOU'RE ABOUT TO DO SOMETHING *STUPID*?

THERE. GOT IT!

YA *SEE*?

SEE WHAT?

HAN--!

HEY--THE *FALCON!* AND THERE'S *CHEWIE!*

IT'S SALLA'S SHIP! TRUST AN OLD GIRLFRIEND TO HELP OUT WHEN A GUY'S IN A JAM!

SOMEHOW YOUR "OLD GIRLFRIENDS" DON'T INSPIRE MUCH TRUST IN ME!

LEIA AND HAN LEAP INTO THE OPEN HOLD OF THE *STARLIGHT INTRUDER*, JUST AS THE FLOATER TAKES A HIT FROM BELOW--

SALLA--BEAUTIFUL! *THANKS!*

GNARRN!

BOBA FETT'S HOT ON OUR TAIL! LET'S *VACATE* THIS DEAD MOON!

THEY'RE MAKIN' THE JUMP, FETT... COORDINATES ARE *DEEP GALACTIC CORE.*

SLAVE II'S FASTER THAN THAT *JUNKER.* WE'LL BE WAITIN' FOR THEM!

NAVICOMP SAYS THE *INTRUDER* IS CLEARED ALL THE WAY TO BYSS, SALLA.

BUT WILL HE *STALL OUT* IN HYPERSPACE--THAT'S WHAT WORRIES ME, NINX.

I REBUILT THE HYPERDRIVE MOTIVATOR THREE TIMES, AND IT *STILL* AIN'T WORKIN' RIGHT!

AS SALLA ZEND AND SHUG NINX FINESSE THE *STARLIGHT INTRUDER'S* ION ENGINES, LEIA FINALLY OPENS THE MYSTERIOUS *GIFT* SHE RECEIVED FROM THE OLD JEDI, VIMA-DA-BODA.

LOOK, HAN--A *LIGHTSABER!*

KINDA LIKE THE *WOMAN* WHO GAVE IT TO YOU...A REAL *ANTIQUE*...

HAN...WILL YOU EVER *UNDERSTAND?* FOR BETTER OR WORSE YOU'RE MARRIED TO THE *JEDI* NOW.

I UNDERSTAND THE THINGS THAT MATTER.

LEIA FEELS HER JEDI POWER STRENGTHEN AS SHE GRIPS THE ANCIENT WEAPON...

SUDDENLY THE EYES OF HER *JEDI VISION* OPEN WITH UNEXPECTED CLARITY.

LUKE...I'M SEEING HIM. HE'S *COMMANDING* THE IMPERIAL FORCES--LIKE OUR *FATHER!*

I FEAR WE'VE LOST HIM, HAN...

I FEAR WE'VE LOST *EVERYTHING.*

HIGH OVER THE GREAT *CALAMARI WATER WORLD* LEIA'S PREMONITIONS ARE PROVING *TRUE*--!

THE ALLIANCE STAR DESTROYER *EMANCIPATOR* IS MAKING AN EXPENSIVE MEAL FOR ONE OF THE EMPEROR'S NEW *WORLD DEVASTATORS!*

THIS SHIP'S DOOMED! JETTISON ALL ESCAPE PODS!

ON BOARD THE LAST ESCAPE POD, *LANDO CALRISSIAN* AND *WEDGE ANTILLES* SURVEY THE NEARLY HOPELESS SITUATION --

I GUESS I JUST WASN'T CUT OUT TO COMMAND STAR DESTROYERS!

HANG ON TO YOUR HAT, BOSS--I'M HEARING GOOD NEWS ON THE ALLIANCE FREQUENCY...

PINNACLE BASE IS SENDING OVER THE *RESERVES!*

WHITE TEAM IS THROUGH!

SUBLIGHT POWER ENGAGED! DEFLECTORS ON!

ARM ALL *TURBOS* AND ION CANNONS!

ATTACKING WITH FEROCITY, THE REBEL RESERVE TEAMS PROVIDE *COVERING FIRE* AS HUNDREDS OF ESCAPE PODS ARE TAKEN ABOARD THE RESCUE FRIGATES--

ALL PODS ACCOUNTED FOR! NOW LET'S SAVE THOSE CALAMARI EVACUEES!

STORMING DOWN OVER THE VAST CALAMARI OCEANS, PHALANXES OF NEW ALLIANCE *E-WINGS* TACKLE THE WORLDSMASHERS HEAD ON!

KNAVE ONE TO KNAVE TEAM-- BLAST ANYTHING THAT LOOKS LIKE A *SCANNING TOWER*-- THAT'S THE KEY TO *VICTORY!*

BUT NOT EVERYONE WILL RETURN TO THE *VICTORY CELEBRATION*--IF THERE *IS* ONE!

KNAVE LEADER, THIS IS KNAVE THREE-- *I'M HIT!*

AS KNAVE THREE TRIES IN VAIN TO DITCH IN THE CALAMARI SEA, HIS CRIPPLED E-WING IMPACTS AGAINST THE GREAT COMMAND DEVASTATOR, *SILENCER 7!*

YAAAAA--

REBEL SCUM! DO THEY REALLY THINK THEY CAN PENETRATE OUR DEFENSES WITH THESE NEW SHIPS?

COMMANDER KLEV, WE'VE GOT A PROBLEM!

THE *MASTER CONTROL COMPUTER* ON *BYSS* IS TRANSMITTING IMPROPER SIGNALS... IT'S SHUTTING US DOWN!

WHAT?! THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! PUT *SILENCER 7* ON OVERRIDE!

DO YOU HEAR ME? *OVERRIDE ALL SYSTEMS!*

WE CAN'T, SIR-- THE MASTER CONTROL SIGNAL HAS LOCKED OUT THE OVERRIDE, SIR!

ON BOARD THE FRIGATE *ANTARES SIX*, LANDO AND WEDGE WATCH THE NOW-TRIUMPHANT REBEL ATTACK--

THIS IS EXCELLENT! THOSE NEW E-WINGS MUST HAVE FOUND THE DEVASTATORS' WEAK SPOT!

NOT THE WAY I SAW IT, WEDGE--

--THAT DEVASTATOR SELF-DESTRUCTED!

WHOEVER'S IN *CHARGE* OF THOSE MONSTERS IS AN IDIOT! YOU'D ALMOST THINK HE *WANTS* TO LOSE!

OKAY, HAN... YOU'VE GOT YOUR WISH--

--WE'RE ENTERING THE DEEP-CORE SECURITY ZONE...

BYSS HAS ACKNOWLEDGED OUR APPROACH...THE WHOLE PLANET IS PROTECTED BY HEAVY-DUTY SHIELD GENERATORS.

KIND OF LIKE THAT SYSTEM WE TOOK OUT ON THE ENDOR MOON!

AND YOU'RE CLEAR TO LAND, RIGHT? TAKE US DOWN!

OH DEAR... I DO HOPE WE'RE NOT TOO LATE TO SAVE ARTOO!

STARLIGHT INTRUDER...WE HAVE CONFIRMATION OF YOUR REGISTRATION CODE... THE PLANETARY PERIMETER WILL OPEN IN EXACTLY 3.2 SECONDS.

AS THE INVISIBLE WINDOW OPENS TO ALLOW THE INTRUDER THROUGH THE PLANETARY SHIELDS, SLAVE II VAULTS OUT OF HYPERSPACE!

BOBA FETT!-- WHAT DID I TELL YA? THAT SLIME SUCKER NEVER GIVES UP!

MOVE IT, SALLA! WE'VE GOT A BOUNTY HUNTER ON OUR TAIL!

PULL UP, FETT! TH' NAVICOMP SAYS THIS PLANET'S PROTECTED BY SECURITY SHIELDS!

THEIR SHIP'S GOIN' THROUGH... SLAVE II WILL FOLLOW THEM IN-- BEFORE THE SHIELDS CAN CLOSE!

BUT SECURITY IS VERY *TIGHT* ON THE EMPEROR'S NEW THRONEWORLD... BOUNTY HUNTERS ARE NOT WANTED ON BYSS!

SIR...I HAVE AN AUTHORIZED DOCKING CODE. BUT THERE'S A SMALLER SHIP RIGHT BEHIND, TRYING TO SNEAK PAST THE SHIELDS.

CUT HIM OFF! *CLOSE THE SHIELDS!*

AS THE ***INTRUDER*** FALLS, SAFELY INTO THE PLANET'S ATMOSPHERE, THE SHIELDS LOCK SHUT AGAINST ***SLAVE II***--

GREAT! WE'RE THROUGH!

HRRAWWNN!

FETT-- YOU IDIOT--!

--THIS IS THE *LAST* TIME I WORK WITH YOU!

THAT'S FINE WITH ME-- WON'T HAVE TO SPLIT THE BOUNTY ON SOLO!

FOLLOWING THEIR APPROVED DESCENT TRAJECTORY, THE *STARLIGHT INTRUDER* DOCKS AT THE IMPERIAL FREIGHT COMPLEX ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE EMPEROR'S RULING CITY.

THIS WORLD... LUKE IS HERE... VERY, VERY DARK...

LET ME PILOT THE *FALCON*--I'LL TAKE US TO LUKE!

PILOT THE *FALCON*? I DON'T KNOW ABOUT *THAT*.

THIS PLACE IS CRAWLIN' WITH PATROL SHIPS AND *HUNTER-KILLER DROIDS!*

BUT ONCE THE INTRUDER IS SAFELY BERTHED, LEIA IS NOT TO BE DENIED.

YOU TAUGHT ME EVERYTHING YOU KNOW, DARLING--TRUST ME!

AND STOP BEING SO *PROTECTIVE!*

IGNORING HER HUSBAND'S PROTESTS, LEIA USES HER JEDI ABILITIES TO GUIDE THE *MILLENNIUM FALCON* UNERRINGLY ACROSS THE MAZELIKE CITY--

YOU SEE THAT *TOWER*? THAT'S WHERE LUKE IS. WE'LL LAND IN THAT BIG HANGAR ON TOP!

RIGHT--IF WE DON'T GET VAPORIZED TO GLOWING FRAGMENTS FIRST!

SECURITY COMMAND, THIS IS *PATROL XL5*... WE ARE IN PURSUIT OF UNREGISTERED TRAFFIC IN SECURITY ZONE *ONE*.

THE *FORCE* WILL GET US THROUGH, HAN...

NNRAWNH!

I KNOW, CHEWIE... BE A POLITE WOOKIEE AND *COOL IT*. I GOT A HUNCH WE'RE GONNA *NEED* THE FORCE TO GET US WHERE *WE'RE* GOIN'!

CONCENTRATING HER JEDI ATTENTION ON THEIR PURSUERS, LEIA FINDS THE *MIND* OF THE PATROL SHIP'S *GUNNER*.

SIR... THEY MUST BE USING A CLOAKING DEVICE. WE'VE LOST VISUAL SIGHTING, AND THE SCANNERS CAN'T FIND THEM EITHER.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN? THAT SHIP IS RIGHT THERE ON THE TARGETING SCREENS! *DESTROY IT!*

SORRY, SIR... THE TARGETING COMPUTER IS *NEVER* WRONG, SIR. MAYBE THEY DROPPED *BEHIND* US, SIR!

YOU *FOOL*! NOW WE'VE MISSED OUR CHANCE!

THAT TRAMP FREIGHTER IS IN VIOLATION OF THE *EMPEROR'S PERSONAL SECURITY ZONE*-- WE'LL BOTH BE *EXECUTED* FOR THIS!

THE SAME JEDI COURAGE THAT LED LUKE SKYWALKER TO SURRENDER TO HIS FATHER ON THE *ENDOR MOON* BRINGS LEIA INTO THE MOUTH OF THE BEAST THAT INTENDS TO *SNUFF OUT* THE LAST LIGHT OF THE JEDI...

PERMIT THEM TO LAND--

--PREPARE TO TAKE THE PRISONERS TO LORD SKYWALKER.

THANKS FOR LETTING ME ADD MY SPECIAL TOUCH TO YOUR PLAN, DEAR.

I HOPE IT WORKS!

GNRAWWN!

WE STILL HAVE TWO LIFE-FORM READINGS ON BOARD, SIR--HUMANOID.

CLOSE THE BAY DOORS. WE'LL GO IN AND TAKE THEM OUT...*DEAD* IF WE HAVE TO!

AS THE STORMTROOPERS PREPARE TO BOARD, THE *MILLENNIUM FALCON* TILTS OFF HER LANDING GEAR AND UNLEASHES ROTATING BLASTER CANNONS!

GOOD WORK, SALLA!

EVERYBODY HIT THE DECK!

WHAT ABOUT *ME?* I'M COMPLETELY DEFENSELESS!

THE PLAN WORKED! SALLA 'N' NINX ARE BLASTING THEIR WAY TO FREEDOM!

I DON'T KNOW WHY I PUT SO MUCH TRUST IN HUMANS...I ALWAYS END UP GETTING HURT!

IF SALLA'S LUCKY, SHE'LL FIND A HOLE TO HIDE THE *FALCON* IN 'TIL WE NEED IT--

RIGHT...LISTEN, HAN, LUKE'S NOT FAR. ALL WE HAVE TO DO NOW IS--

L-LUKE!

LEIA. YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE COME HERE.

IT WILL NOT GO WELL.

MY MASTER WISHES TO SPEAK WITH YOU.

MY *SENTINELS* WILL ESCORT YOU TO THE EMPEROR'S PRESENCE.

THE *EMPEROR?*

WHAT DO YOU *MEAN?*

YES.

HE *LIVES.*

ESCORTED BY THE FORMIDABLE SENTINELS, LEIA, HAN, CHEWBACCA, AND THREEPIO ARE TAKEN TO THE SUBTERRANEAN LEVELS OF THE TOWER... TO THE EMPEROR'S *CLONE LABORATORIES*.

OH, ARTOO! LOOK WHAT THEY'VE DONE TO YOU! I WARNED YOU THERE WAS GOING TO BE TROUBLE!

BWEEET?

LEIA. HAN. IT WAS *VERY* FOOLISH FOR YOU TO COME HERE.

I TOLD YOU THAT *MY* DESTINY IS NOT *YOURS*.

I CAN SEE YOU'VE REALLY GONE OFF THE *DEEP END* THIS TIME, KID... LOOKS LIKE BEING A *JEDI* WAS TOO MUCH FOR YOU.

BE QUIET, HAN.

THERE ARE THINGS FAR BEYOND THE MIND AND POWERS OF A *SPACE PIRATE*... THINGS YOU'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND.

HEY, WAIT A MINUTE. I CAN READ A *FACE*, FARM BOY. YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY FROM THE *IDEALISTIC KID* WHO COULDN'T WAIT TO GET OFF TATOOINE AND JOIN THE REBELLION...

A LONG WAY *DOWN*.

HAN...TAKE IT EASY. YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT HE'S BEEN THROUGH.

MASTER LUKE, ARTOO SAYS THEY'VE *ERASED* HIS MAIN PROGRAMMING! ...HOW COULD YOU... LET...THEM...?

LORD SKYWALKER. THE MASTER WISHES TO MEET OUR GUESTS.

OF COURSE.

TAKE THEIR WEAPONS.

LEIA... GIVE ME THE LIGHTSABER.

NOT ON YOUR LIFE--

WE'RE LEAVIN' HERE *NOW*. AND THIS TIME YOU'RE COMIN' WITH US!

AHHH!

LUKE! YOUR *HAND*!

YES...THEY'RE MAKING ME ANOTHER-- A *BETTER* ONE.

GIVE ME THE LIGHTSABER, LEIA.

SHRUMMMMN

GOOD!

LEIA! DON'T BE A FOOL!

I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENED TO YOU...BUT GET BACK--

EXCELLENT!

STRIKE YOUR BROTHER--!

--THEN YOU'LL SEE WHAT NEW *POWERS* HE'S WON FROM THE *DARK SIDE* OF THE FORCE!

NO!

LET GO OF MY HUSBAND, YOU OVERGROWN FREAK!

NOW--WE'RE LEAVING. AND WE'RE TAKING LUKE WITH US.

BRAVE LITTLE JEDI!

BUT REALLY, SUCH AN OLD LIGHTSABER IS NOT A WORTHY WEAPON FOR YOU!

LOOK AT YOU... BROTHER AND SISTER... JEDI. THE LAST OF YOUR KIND.

AND I HAVE YOU BOTH!

THIS ONE ...MY DEAR APPRENTICE ... SO STRONG IN THE FORCE ...

HE HAS LEARNED HIS LESSONS WELL.

AND THE SISTER... SO VULNERABLE...SO INEXPERIENCED...

AND YET IT IS SHE WHO HOLDS THE KEY TO THE FUTURE!

DON'T WORRY, LITTLE JEDI...I WILL NOT *HARM* YOU.

INDEED, I WILL TEACH YOU THINGS YOU HAVE *NEVER* IMAGINED. I WILL SHOW YOU THE *REAL* POWER A JEDI CAN WIELD!

COME, MY SON. BRING YOUR SISTER... AND HER *FRIENDS*. LET US REVEAL TO THEM THE *WONDERS* I HAVE IN STORE...

LET US SHOW THEM THE FUTURE OF THE GALAXY... MY *CLONES*.

TESTED BY THE *DARK WILL* THAT HAS ENSLAVED A GALAXY, THE FORCE SUDDENLY GROWS *STRONG* IN LEIA...

LONG AGO I FOUND MY *FLESH* COULD NOT WITHSTAND THE AWESOME *DEMANDS* OF THE DARK SIDE...

THE GREAT EMPEROR PALPATINE DISCOVERED HE WAS *DYING*.

MY BODY WAS LITERALLY *CONSUMED* BY THE ENERGIES I HAD RELEASED...

FORTUNATELY... FORTUNATELY THERE WAS A *WAY*... A ROAD TO *ETERNAL LIFE*--

WELL DONE... YOUR FIRST STEP TOWARD THE DARK SIDE OF THE FORCE!

NOW LET ME SHOW YOU SOMETHING.

AH...AHHHH!

L-LUKE! HELP ME!

YOU FILTH! YOU'VE KILLED HER!

NO... JUST A LITTLE DISCIPLINE... FOR A JEDI.

TAKE HER TO MY QUARTERS. IT IS TIME FOR HER TO BEGIN HER TRAINING--

FILLED WITH UNCONTROLLABLE *RAGE*, HAN BREAKS FREE OF THE SENTINEL'S IRON GRIP--

TRAITOR!

OUT OF MY WAY!

I STRONGLY SUGGEST YOU REFRAIN FROM VIOLENCE, HAN... FOR *LEIA'S* SAKE.

:GLAACK:...

YOU'VE BECOME... JUST LIKE HIM... HAVEN'T YOU... JUST LIKE *VADER*-- OR *WORSE*.

YOU UNDERSTAND *NOTHING* OF WHAT IS TAKING PLACE--OR WHAT I AM DOING TO SAVE THE GALAXY.

YOU DON'T DESERVE... TO LIVE... FOR WHAT YOU'VE DONE... LUKE... I'LL KILL YOU... MYSELF... IF I... :GLCK:... GET THE CHANCE!

THAT MAY BE TRUE, HAN. I MAY *HAVE* TO DIE.

BUT I ASSURE YOU, IT WON'T BE *YOU* WHO DOES THE DEED.

G85